



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 2, 1997

Washington, D.C. -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has named James E. Nier as coordinator for departmentwide programs for homeless veterans.

In announcing the appointment, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown said: "It is a national tragedy that, on any given night, some 250,000 veterans are on our streets without a home. Jim Nier has a great record of supporting veterans at the local level and through his leadership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars [VFW]. His experience and outstanding organizational skills will be invaluable in VA's continuing efforts to assist homeless veterans."

Nier began his work with veterans at the grassroots level in Texas, where he served from 1987 to 1996 as the Director of Veterans Assistance in El Paso County. He worked tirelessly to address veterans' concerns, including homelessness, in close association with civic and veterans' organizations throughout the state. Nier also has served as an adviser to the Texas Veterans Commission on a number of issues, including assistance for homeless veterans.

In August 1996, Nier was elected Commander-in-Chief of the VFW, a post he still holds. During his tenure, the 2.1-million-member VFW has dramatically expanded homeless outreach programs at VFW state organizations and posts throughout the country. VFW service officers routinely seek out homeless veterans to ensure that they are made aware of available services, and follow through in linking veterans with the assistance they need.

Between 1981 and 1987, Nier held administrative and faculty positions at El Paso Community College. He served in the Army for 22 years, retiring as a Sergeant Major, the Army's highest enlisted grade. His service included duty in Korea and Vietnam. Educated in Maryland, Nier received a B.S. degree from Mount Saint Mary's College and an M.S. degree from Frostburg State College.

VA is the only federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless persons. Although limited to veterans and their dependents, VA's major homeless programs constitute the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country, offering a wide array of services and initiatives to help veterans recover from homelessness and live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible, including outreach and case management, treatment, rehabilitation, transitional residential care, therapeutic work and assistance with permanent housing.

Since 1987, VA has treated and assisted 200,000 homeless veterans. Of those completing VA programs, 40 percent had stable housing, and 40 percent were employed at discharge. On average, homeless veterans served by VA doubled their incomes, and most continue to use VA outpatient programs for the treatment of their medical or psychiatric problems.

To increase assistance and extend the continuum of care for homeless veterans, VA forged partnerships throughout the nation with veterans service organizations, other federal agencies, state and local governments, and community-based service providers. The growth in these alliances is reflected, in part, in VA's support for nearly 5,500 transitional and permanent beds for homeless veterans in urban and rural communities throughout the country.

In fiscal years 1994-96, through its Homeless Grants and Per Diem Program, VA awarded 84 grants totaling nearly \$18 million to groups in 32 states and the District of Columbia to develop new homeless assistance programs. The grant and per diem program is responsible for approximately 1,700 new community-based beds.